



Netwatch

BY JIM CARROLL

YOUR GUIDE TO BUSINESS & ACCOUNTING ON THE INTERNET

Do you copy?

My work took me to Australia this summer, and it made me think about the proposed changes to Canada's Copyright Act announced in June. How so? Because I took my family on the trip, and my sons and I spent quite some time preparing digital media to take along for the hellishly long flight.

We've always tried to avoid the portable video game scene, but we wanted to be sure the boys would be able to keep themselves busy on the plane if Mom or Dad actually managed to fall asleep. This is when the great Sony PlayStation Portable (PSP) negotiations began.

"Dad, if we had a Sony PSP, we could put video on it and our music, so we wouldn't have to take our iPods." It made sense to me, so I gave in.

The next question was what video to get. You can buy movies for the PSP, but the cost can quickly add up. At home, I've got two computers that can record TV shows directly to disc: one runs Windows Media Center XP; the other, SnapStream's BeyondTV. How to get the shows onto the PSP? We looked at a bunch of software programs that do the job and settled on PQ DVD's PSP Movie Creator — it takes a bunch of video files and converts them into the smaller format required by a PSP, then copies them over.

As for music, it's easy to take MP3 files and copy them onto a PSP. But from the early days, I've tried to teach my sons about the issue of copyright and respecting the rights of musical artists. They have had iTunes accounts for several years and purchase music online: they recharge their accounts with funds from birthday gifts or allowances.

But because of Apple's licensing restrictions, we couldn't copy the purchased iTunes songs over to the PSPs. This is one downside of the current "Balkanization" of music formats, but one that is easily solved. I downloaded a copy of DoubleTwist, a program written by the Norwegian fellow who cracked the encryption code used on DVDs. Install it on a Windows machine, attach your iPod, and you get an MP3 copy of the song you've purchased.

Finally, we rented a few DVDs and used DVD Decryptor to copy them to my hard drive, and then used the PSP Movie Creator to convert them to PSP format.

By this point, my guys were well equipped for a lot of flying. It's amusing to look back and realize that they used little of it: they slept for most of the flight.

What does this have to do with Canada's copyright laws? Most of what we did would be considered illegal under the proposed changes to the act, and my sons and I could be subject to heavy penalties — and even jail time — for the innocuous activities we undertook. That's because the most onerous provisions of the act make any activity that circumvents a digital protection scheme illegal. Certainly what we did with the DVDs and iTunes songs would fall under this provision.

As for taping TV shows and converting them, that would still be legal, as long as the cable company sent them in a "clear" format. If, at some point, the cable companies add some form of encryption to the signal, then that would be an infringement as well.

For years, Canadians have had the right to make copies of music and video files for personal use. The amendments to the Copyright Act take that capability away. Most Canadians don't realize this is happening.

At the conference I attended in Australia, I gave a speech about how the country can remain competitive in the global economy. It's too bad our government doesn't worry about such matters and instead seems to spend its time figuring out how to throw innocent citizens in jail.

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MEDIA CONVERSION TOOLS

SnapStream Beyond TV
www.snapstream.com

PQ DVD PSP Movie Creator www.pqdvd.com

DoubleTwist www.doubletwist.com

DVD Decryptor no longer available online